

John 15:1-8

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- [0:00] Good evening, and thank you, Pastor Ian, very much for the blessing to be with you. Thank you, Michelle, for all your help, make it possible to come.
- I'd like, if I may, first to share about what we do. May I ask how many of you heard me before speaking about Gaza?
- Okay, thank you. Can we get the pictures? It seems the majority didn't hear me before, so excuse me if I will repeat things here.
- The Gaza Strip, this is where I was born and grew up, and this is where the Palestinian people live. In Gaza, there is about 1.6 million, and in the West Bank, there is about 2.5 million.
- And we have almost 4 million in the exile. The Christian in Gaza is very small.
- [1:12] It's about less than 2,000 people. The majority are Muslims. Next, please. I usually talk in details about the conflict, but this will not be the right time.
- But this is just show the map about what's happening between Israel and Palestine. Next, please. The Gaza Strip is a very small piece of land.
- It's about 30 miles long and 7 miles wide. 1.5, as I said, 1.6 million living in it. We are in the border with Egypt from the south, and we are with Israel from the north.
- And usually, when people ask me what it's like to live in Gaza, I say, I've never been in prison, but I lived in one when I was in Gaza. This is how is the situation.
- The siege is really difficult, whereas the majority of people cannot move in and out. Next, please. The siege in Gaza is not only from the ground, but also from the sea.
- [2:17] For example, fishermen cannot go too far in water for fishing, otherwise their life would be in danger. And also the siege from the sky as well. We don't have airport, and so we depend heavily on Egypt and Israel concerning moving in and out.
- Next, please. This is the border with Israel from the north, but 99% of the people cannot use this border. Just show you how crowded the Gaza Strip.
- Like, if you are looking from a high building, you just see a heavy, big piece of cement, and it's very crowded. They say the most populated area in the world.
- We continue in Gaza, like now we live in Jordan, but I travel between Jordan and Gaza. And we continue to do relief work because the unemployment in Gaza is about 45%.
- And they say 80% of the people in Gaza, they depend on different charities for food. So Christian Mission to Gaza, and also the support of your church, we're able each year to help the needy and the poor in Gaza.
- [3:33] We spend about \$10,000 each year with food, medicine, and closing school uniform. Next, please. These are some of the families we help with food.
- Many of them live in very difficult situations, and this is the problem which is created even back many years in 1948. Many Palestinians became refugees.

Next. This is the church building, Gaza Baptist. I passed the church there for more than 12 years. But in 2007, the situation became very dangerous.

We have to leave. But I still, the Lord put in my heart to go from time to time to help the church in Gaza. So this is the church from inside.

The sixth floor buildings, the first two floors we used for the only Christian public library in Gaza. And also the third floor we want to do medical clinic.

[4 : 39] And the fifth floor we use as Sunday school. And we worship in the sixth floor. And one floor we use as a guest house.

Next. This is the library from inside. The library started back in the 60s. And as I said, it's the only Christian public library in the whole Gaza Strip.

This is the school. It's a Christian school, evangelical school. It's called the Lighthouse. And we partner with a number of different organizations to be able to support the school.

And we help the students where the majority are poor. We help them with the school uniform every year. We have more than 200 students.

And the majority are from Muslim background. Next, please. Next. Maybe I shared this with you before.

[5 : 39] But whereas we, the Bible Society has been bombed. And there was a difficult time we went through before. Next, please. And this has been repeated.

And it was just a difficult time to go through when you receive a phone call after midnight or 2.30 in the morning. And tell you there is a bomb.

And you have to deal with it and try to help and to recover and to be healed. Now in Jordan, where we live, my wife, she teaches in a Christian school.

And I have the privilege to teach at JITS. We have students coming from Egypt, from Syria, and also from Jordan.

There is restrictions now, but before we have more freedom. But now the government, they will not give permission or visa for certain students to come to study.

[6 : 45] We have about 60 students now. But before we almost have 150 or so. Next. Next. This is the library.

Next. This is the library. Some of my students where I'm teaching. Also, God really blessed us in Jordan to minister to Iraqi refugee Christians.

You must have heard about how many Christians in Iraq are fleeing Iraq because of the persecution. So they come to Jordan. And Jordan will be like a transition place for them where they'll be staying usually for a few years.

And then with the help of the UN, able to immigrate to other countries because their life in Iraq has become very dangerous. And I felt connected with Iraqi refugees because we also are refugees from Gaza.

And both of us went through the fire of persecution. So we feel connected. And it's really an honor to serve them.

[8 : 06] And we meet every Tuesday. We minister to about 130 families. Most of them are Iraqi refugees.

Question. Next, please. These are some of the people I have the privilege to disciple Iraqi refugees.

Some of the families we visited. You know the interesting thing, which almost every Iraqi family has their own story.

The previous, if I get the previous picture, Maher and Linda, maybe you heard about it months ago there was about four Sawasai bombers enter a church in Iraq.

And these men, unfortunately, they just explode themselves and more than 50 people have been killed in that service and almost 100 have been injured.

[9:14] Linda, usually she goes to that church. But that Sunday, she didn't go because it was the birthday of her husband.

So God spared her life for a purpose. On the other hand, her husband, Maher, his older brother, been executed, been killed by militants.

And Maher himself received the threat. So he had to flee and to come down to Jordan. So there's a lot of things personally I learned from the Iraqi families.

Next, please. Albert family, his wife was leaving another church. And when she left the service, just close to the church building, there was a car planted there to just explode.

And as she walked beside it, she, of course, hurt badly. Next. And this is her pictures. But we thank God, as you saw her picture before, she's okay after a number of surgeries.

[10:28] So this is, unfortunately, how many Iraqi refugee Christians go through. I should say, you know, what's happening is really affect many families over there.

But the Christian in particular, as a weak part, it seems it's been targeted the most. Next. Our friend and his family, he used to drive, working as the driver and helping the priest and drive him around.

And that particular day, the priest asked him not to drive him. And he chose another person. And in that particular day, the priest and the three other deacons in the same car been killed and executed.

And God spared his life for a purpose. And this is the kind of families the Lord put in our life to minister and to learn from and to worship together back in Jordan.

Some of you heard about Rami and I shared, but I will just make it short. Rami also was a member in our church back in 07 and he'd been kidnapped by militants.

[12:00] And after 10 hours, been executed because of his faith. He was working with my wife in the Bible Society. And that was really a very difficult time. And when he executed, he left Pauline.

Next, please. Next. And two children. And at that time, his wife was pregnant. And later on, she has a baby girl and she called her Sama.

Sama mean heaven. And she said, because Rami, he's in heaven. And this is really what it's all about, loved one, because of our hope and faith in the risen Lord and because heroes, we will rise with him.

And this is the main thing, really keep us moving forward. And we feel the life we live, worse to live it for him and to reflect his love, even it will cost us our life.

I like, if we finish, I think, with the pictures. If I may read some verses from John 15.

[13:08] I will read verse 1 to 11.

Please keep Pauline and the children in your prayer. They live now in West Bank. And we thank God she has strong testimony.

But of course, it's not easy as a single, as a widow, raising three children in their ages.

John 15, 1 to 11, I'm reading from the NIV, where we're talking about the importance of abiding in Christ.

And this is what really continue to inspire and to encourage us in our ministry and in our walk with the Lord. I am the true vine and my father is the gardener.

[14:06] He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me and I will remain in you.

No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remain in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

[15:08] If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you. This is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples.

As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my father's commands and remain in his love.

May God bless his word.

Let us just pray, ask the Lord to open our hearts and our minds as we look to his word. Lord, we thank you for the privilege to be together as the body of Christ, as a family, where you are the head.

Thank you, Lord, that your word is in you in every day. Maybe we heard these words many times before, but we pray that will continue to inspire us and continue to encourage us.

[16:25] We submit to you that you continue to shape us and to make us the people you want us to be. Cover our weaknesses, our sins under the power of your blood.

Renew our strength. We trust that your word will meet our needs. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. The importance of abiding.

You know, loved one, chapter 13 to chapter 17, consider the last chapters that Jesus taught before he went to the cross.

So there is a very important message he wants to give to the disciples and part of it in John 15, abiding in the true vine.

Also, the Gospel of John is known about the seven sayings of Jesus where he say, I am the light of the Lord. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the bread of life. I am the life and the resurrection.

[17:22] And here he said, I am the true vine. Because the vine or the vineyard in the Old Testament, it's referred to the people of Israel like we see in Isaiah chapter 5.

And where he talks about, he prepared that place, the fence, the tower, the ground, and expecting, expecting the farm, expecting that this vineyard will bring good fruits.

But when the time of the harvest came, unfortunately, it was bad fruit. So when Jesus said, I am the true vine to distinguish himself from any other vine.

And he expect in my life and in your life to be a fruit, will be pleasing to him and to reflect his love to others.

I'm going to share with you quickly about four things concerning abiding. First, what is abiding? Second, why we should abide?

[18:27] Third, how to abide? And the last thing, the result of abiding. You know, somebody said some people, their commitment to the Lord is like a nail superficially attached to a piece of wood.

It's very easy to take it, to take the nail off by your hand. But other people, their commitment, their abiding, the nail is going a little deeper in the piece of wood.

You cannot take it with your hand, but if you have a hammer, you can take it off. But other people, and I pray, may God help us all to be in this level of commitment. It's not only a nail in the piece of wood, but it's like a screw going all the way.

In the piece of wood. You cannot take it with your hand. You cannot even take it with a hammer. It's become part. You cannot separate the two. And this is how the Lord wants my life and your life and our commitment and abiding as branches in the true vine.

What is abiding? Abiding is not only Jesus lives in me. Of course, the scripture teaches in the moment I give my heart to the Lord, I've been sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[19:45] But also teach us not only Jesus in me, but I in him. And this is what the testimony of one of the believers who was very excited about his faith.

You know, he just got saved and he stood up and share his testimony. And he said, Jesus lives in me and I live in him. And there was unbeliever and start to laugh.

And okay, we understand. You say Jesus lives in you, but how you live in him? And they say, well, it's very simple. If you have a poker and you put the poker in the fire, is it the fire in the poker or the poker in the fire?

If you have a sponge filled with water, is it the water in the sponge or the sponge in the water? So it's not, you see, Jesus in me, you know, this is what he prayed in John 17.

He said to the Father, as you are in me and I in you, they may all be in us. So Jesus in me, he's my salvation.

[20:46] He's my comfort, my peace. I in him to seek him, to be more like him and to do his will. You know, I believe the Lord wants us to live in peace and experience joy.

But also most important, I believe the Lord wants every one of us to be more like him in every day in our walk with him, abiding in Christ.

He lives in me and I in him. You know, Paul in Philippians 3, he said in verse 9 to be found in him.

And in verse 10, he said, I want to know him. And, you know, maybe we're surprised, you know, why Paul, after 30 years of ministry, 30 years of mission, 30 years of planting churches, and he still say, I want to know him.

Don't you already knew him 30 years ago when you were in your way from Jerusalem to Damascus? But what he's saying, I want to know him in a deeper way, in a better way, in every day I walk with him.

[21:58] So we need loved one every day as we bow before him, as we submit, as we ask him to lead and to guide us. And he's saying, I want to experience everything, every area in Christ, even the power of his resurrection, I want to experience now.

Can you imagine the power which has raised Jesus from death? He wants this power by the Holy Spirit to experience in his daily life with the Lord. And he said also, I want to experience the fellowship of his suffering.

I don't mind to suffer for Christ. And we know what Paul went through. Why we should abide? He said, every branch in verse 2, which is not bearing fruit, that branch will be cut off.

Every branch is not planted by our Heavenly Father, will be uprooted. And probably this verse related to Judas, where he looks like a branch.

He's among the group. Look, he's part of the team or the family. But in reality, he didn't have any fruit or any fellowship, real fellowship or relationship with the Lord.

[23:15] But on the other hand, he say, every branch which is bringing more fruit, he will prune. He will prune that branch in order to help that branch even to bring more fruits.

I remember my father back in Palestine in the springtime. He has a special scissor where he comes with these branches and tries to cut and to clean and to help these branches.

Because he sees the potential. You see, he sees the potential in each branch can even bring more fruit. You know, our Heavenly Father, if I may say, with his heavenly scissors sometimes, he comes to my life and to your life to clean certain things in our life.

You know, to purify us and to help us to be more like him and to bring the fruit which will be pleasing to him. Why we should abide?

Because there is no life in the branch itself. I mean, you ever saw branches thrown on the side of the road and had life or leaves or fruit in itself?

[24:23] No. This branch has to abide and remain abiding in the vine. Otherwise, we'll be dead. You and I, we need continuously to remain.

Allow the juice of the vine to go through us, to feed us, to nurture us, and to help us to grow. Why we need to abide?

Because he said in verse 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. I am the vine, you are the branches.

And I try to remind myself, there are only one vine. Regardless how many years I have been a believer, regardless how many years you and I have been serving the Lord, there is only one vine.

And as a branch, I will never, you will never become a vine. Which means I cannot be independent from the vine. And always I need to depend on the vine.

[25:31] And also he said in the same verse, because without me you can do nothing. Without me you can do nothing. And trust me, believe me, brothers, sisters, that without abiding in him, there will never be real fruit in our life.

The love he speaks about, the fruit of the Spirit. I mean, how are you able to love somebody? It's hard to love. How you could forgive somebody who hurt you.

How you, you and I, be able to live on the level of the Sermon on the Mount. We cannot, without abiding, without allow the Holy Spirit to inspire, to fill us and able to live on that level.

Let's remind me of a story about an artist who was drawing beautiful pictures.

And he used different colors and the brush and paper and all of that. And the story said after a number, several hours, he drew a beautiful picture.

[26:46] And the story said he left the room. And when he left the room, there was an argument on that picture. And the red color stood up and he said, I am the beauty which stands behind the beauty of this picture.

And the yellow color said, No, no, I am the secret behind the beauty of this picture. And the same thing with other colors. And then the brush said, No, no, no, you forget the artist hold me, you know, in his fingers and, you know, draw the picture.

And the paper said, No, no, no, you forget he draw the picture on me. So I am the secret which stands behind the beauty of this picture. And in the midst of this argument, the artist walked in and gently and loving point at the picture and said, Without me, you can do nothing.

Without him, we will not be able to bear the fruit which will reflect his love. Why we should abide? Because he gave a typical picture in Palestine in verse 6 about these branches.

Because the branch has two options, either to bear fruit or to be used for the fire. And this is what the farmer in Palestine will do.

[28:07] He collects these branches, the dry one and the fruitful one, and under the sun will dry up and then will be used for fire.

If abiding is so important, how to abide? Well, first we need to abide through his word. He said, If you abide in me and my word abide in you.

So, let his word become part of your life. Let his word lead and guide you and continue and inspire you. The word of God is like a mirror for you and me.

The word of God is like a hammer. The word of God is sharper than two-inched sword. The word of God is like a fire. This is why he said in verse 3, You are pure because what I told you.

So, when we allow the word of God to speak to our hearts, it will purify our thoughts, purify our minds, and make us and help us to be more like him.

[29:08] How to abide? Abide in his love. He said, Abide in my love. What is the evidence I'm abiding in his love if I keep his commandments? And he said, This is how I approve my love to the Father by keeping his commandments.

And 1 John said, If I say I know him, but I didn't keep his commandments, I am a liar. And if I said I'm abiding in him, but I don't walk the way I should walk, then I'm deceiving myself.

I don't know. Back in the Middle East, we have a problem between what we believe in and how we live. And there is a big gap between the two. If you ask people there, you know, a number of people, if you believe in Christ, and if you believe in his teaching, if you believe in his commandments, many people will say, Yeah.

But why you didn't live what you believe? You know, the scriptures say, even the evil one believe. And he said this, the people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far away.

I just pray, God, help us all to live what we believe. Sometimes we sing beautiful songs, but my prayer, Lord, help me to live what I'm singing. We pray, and Lord, I pray to help me to live what I'm praying.

[30:43] And Lord, I preach and speak, but help me to live what I'm teaching or what I'm preaching. May what we believe will not be separated how we live our life.

The result of abiding, when we abide, loved one, then there will be much fruit in my life and in your life. The fruit of the spirit will appear and to reflect his love.

And then the father will be glorified, like I say in verse eight. The father will be glorified. One of the signs that we are his disciples if we bear fruit.

Maybe you heard me once before say there is, the word Christian just mentioned three times in the whole Bible, but the word disciple mentioned 232 times.

So the heart of God for you and for me, not only to be called Christians, but to be real followers, real disciples. When we abide, we're able to face the storms.

[31:55] And you know how life is so fragile and we need to handle it by prayer. We need to handle it by abiding in him. We went through a lot of storms, but if we continue to remain, we will be able to overcome.

And you know that the strong branch in the vine will be able to face the storms and continue to remain and not be even shaken.

You know, Joseph was a good example. In Genesis 49, he said, Joseph is, verse 22 to 24, Joseph is a branch in a fruitful tree.

And he said, this tree is planted on the spring. And the tree referred to the forefathers, Isaac, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And Joseph was a fruitful branch in that tree. And he said, that branch is climbing on a wall. And if you remember the different walls that Joseph was able to overcome, when people hurt him, the closest to him, he didn't allow betterness or unforgiveness to rule.

[33 : 09] And always, I try to remind myself, I have two options. If I allow betterness to rule, it will destroy my life. Or I bring my hurts, my pain before him and say, Lord, it's very difficult.

And you know, Jesus himself, he'd been hurt by the closest people, the people he will love. But then, you can experience healing and you will have power to forgive.

So, Joseph was able to overcome because he was a branch, fruitfully branch and a fruitfully tree. And he was able to overcome.

He didn't allow the darkness of the prison. 13 years in the prison and he didn't deserve to be there. But he also didn't allow that darkness to rule and to destroy his life.

He was able to stand up and to be used mighty by the Lord. Even as a young man away from Palestine where his family went to Egypt, teenagers, 17 years old, when sin or temptation coming running after him, he cried out, how I could do this great evil against the Lord?

[34 : 21] And he refused to bow to temptation and to sin. He was able to overcome because he was a fruitful branch and a fruitful tree.

you know, the good farmer in Palestine, when he sees there is a good branch in the vine, what he does, he takes that branch and he paints it and the end of that branch he will plant it in the sand and then that branch will even bring other branches and the Lord wants us to be blessing and bring others to him.

And the last thing Jesus said, I'm teaching you this, he said, I'm giving you this because I want your joy be completed. You know, I feel sometimes we're torn between different things in life because we did not completely submit or abiding or remain abiding.

May God help us all, loved one, continue to depend on him because indeed without him we can do nothing.

And maybe as we submit to him, allow him to continue to fill us by his presence and by his power in every day. Then when the storm will come but when you're hiding in the true vine you will be okay.

[35 : 52] As long as you keep your eyes on him everything will be okay. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for the gift of salvation and thank you that you called us to live and to reflect your love.

Lord, we thank you that you continue to bring hunger and thirst in our hearts for you. Indeed, you are the only one who can bring real satisfaction, real contentment to our hearts and to our life.

Help us to remain and continue and continue to remain in the vine in every day of our life. May the fruit of the spirit, the love, the peace, the peace and the faith will be appeared in our life.

We love you and we praise you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. God bless you.